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Toward doing Reconceptualist Work in K-12

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Reconceptualist work in curriculum studies resides in an intellectual Patagonia—a distant provincial backwater too often forgotten in the tumultuous capital centers—and places its sole hope for curricular (and social) change on the faint messages it telegraphs from self-chosen margins. To any honest reconceptualist scholar in curriculum studies, the above statement is obvious, and therefore, requires no elaboration. As evidence of this statement, ask a teacher or administrator in K-12 education if they have ever heard of the area or its scholars.

Taking this marginalization as a starting point, this critical reflection 1) articulates that reconceptualist work in curriculum studies presents an a-historical imposition that lacks convincing praxis, 2) develops a “physiognomy of historical discourse” to re-frame reconceptualist work, and 3) argues for reclaiming relevancy of curriculum studies through a new synthesis of reconceptualist work and philosophical pragmatism.

Specifically, in the first section, this critical reflection argues that reconceptualists’ rejection of philosophical pragmatism (Jackson, 1980; Jackson, 1996; Pinar, 1975; Pinar, 1978; Pinar, 2002) makes for an a-historical Continental imposition on US educational discourse. Reconceptualists’ “second wave” (Pinar, 2002; Slattery, 1995) emerges in this discussion as possible re-reconnection with US educational discourse and practices. In the second section, this critical reflection presents a physiognomy of historical discourse as starting point for conversations regarding curriculum work. This physiognomy of historical discourse articulates that historical, social, and political projects like those represented in curriculum work do not emerge under conditions of one’s choosing, but rather, curriculum work represents an historically and socially mediated conversation. Finally, in the third section, this critical reflection holds that curriculum work reclaim philosophical pragmatism in a new synthesis with reconceptualist work. This synthesis of reconceptualist work and philosophical pragmatism incorporates cultural criticism and administrative vision in creating curriculum spaces in schools, programs, and classroom lessons.

Reconceptualist Work as a-Historical

Although it is impossible to outline the expansive and contested reconceptualization of curriculum studies, this section characterizes reconceptualist work¹ in order to critique but not dismiss it. The reconceptualization of the curriculum studies toward understanding curriculum and away from curriculum development marked —specifically speaking— a rejection of Ralph Tyler’s work (1949) as “cul-de-sac” (Pinar, 1975, p. 398) and —generally speaking— a rejection of the philosophical pragmatism in education from which Tyler emerged. The reconceptualists, though diverse in intellectual perspectives and at odds with each other regarding paradigmatic discussions (Jackson, 1996; Lincoln, 1996; Pinar, 2002), have in common an understanding that “curriculum theorizing is apparently [cultural] criticism” (Pinar, 1975, p. 400). This cultural criticism increasingly focuses on “the introduction of other traditions (like existentialism) to a professional educational audience” (Pinar, 1975, p. 400).

Pinar (1975; 1978; 2002; 2004), as an historian of curriculum studies and proponent of its reconceptualization, describes this general paradigm shift. This reconceptualization of curriculum studies draws, predominantly but not exclusively, on the successive introduction of Continental discourses. Apple’s work (e.g., 1979) theorizes curriculum through Gramsci’s readings of the German Idealist tradition. Greene’s work (e.g., 1971) theorizes curriculum through French existentialists and philosophers of consciousness. Pinar’s work (e.g., 1975) theorizes curriculum through a variety of lenses with a special focus on German phenomenology. Giroux (e.g., 1993; 1997) and McLaren (e.g., 1996) struggle over the meanings of cultural Marxist and poststructuralist theory as it relates to curriculum and instruction. Most recently, feminist scholars and feminist scholars of color (Noddings, 1992; Delpit, 1986; Delpit, 1988; Lather, 1992; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Cary, 2003; Cary, 2006) complicate the discussion begun by the reconceptualists in important ways; nonetheless, the conversation remains decidedly Continental in its trajectory.

Further complicating this discussion is reconceptualists’ ambivalent attitude toward their early work and its results. For example, Apple’s (2000) later commentary, in which he critiques “negative criticisms” of his 70s work using hegemonic theory as analytic lens, represents this ambivalence:

More and more, however, it is quite clear that many of what used to be called “bourgeoisie rights” were the result of struggles. ...We began to realize that our attacks on liberalism in education and elsewhere — which were correct in many ways— came at a time when actually it would have been wiser to focus more on the real concerns of people in local communities.
(p. 166)

Apple, in his later commentary (2000), ironically objects “to being called a reconceptualist” (p. 167) though his early work profited from reconceptualist forums (e.g., 1979). More recently, Apple (2000) re-interprets his work within “the democratic socialist tradition and the populist tradition in the United States...” (p. 167).

This critical reflection seconds Apple's re-interpretation of curriculum work toward the concerns of communities, teachers, and students.

Nonetheless, recent commentary (Kashope Wright, 2000) on the curriculum field outlines a felicitous pluralism regarding *state-of-the-art* curriculum theorizing under the influence of "post" discourses. This curriculum theorizing has been variously institutionalized and freed of institutional constraints, restricted to K-12 schooling and opened up to other pedagogical spaces, queered, raced, gendered, aestheticized, psychocanalyzed, moralized, modernized, and postmodernized. (p. 10)

Continental discourses continue to colonize reconceptualists' work with each new trend adding newer layers. With each layer of Continental or Continental-influenced discourse, reconceptualist work becomes more rarified, less accessible to practitioners and communities, more "meta" in what it takes for granted. Although reconceptualists consider their work as historicized, the irony is that reconceptualist work, rather than engaging practitioners in an historical moment, reads like a virtual playground, unintelligible to the uninitiated. Ramos (1996 [1934]), who comments on the imposition of Continental discourses at *La Universidad Autónoma de México* in the 1930s, describes this state of affairs as a tenacious idealism that frequently resists being useful...the faith in pure thinking and political dogma that appear on this side of the world as a brilliant but superficial intelligence, as a facile rhetorical Jacobinism. (p. 44)

To diminish this critique by arguing that this reconceptualist work transcends K-12 education, or conversely, that reconceptualists are practitioners in higher ed (Kashope Wright, 2000) represents a disingenuous argument for a privileged position in which *thinking*—not *doing*—represents the only criteria for *knowing*.

In contrast to de-emphasizing K-12 education or offering university work as praxis, this critical reflection hastens the reconceptualist "second wave" (Pinar, 1978; Pinar, 2002; Pinar, 2004; Slattery, 1995) in which reconceptualist work influences K-12 schooling. As Slattery (1995) writes:

Since this new scholarship has gained ascendancy in the major universities of the United States and Canada, among other countries, it is only a matter of time before a new generation of curriculum specialists brings this scholarship into the schools. William Pinar (1988a) alludes to the movement of the Reconceptualization from universities to elementary and secondary schools when he writes about the 'second wave' of the reconceptualization from university scholars, to graduate students, and finally to elementary and secondary teachers. (p. 7)

This "second wave" of the reconceptualization represents the line of thinking that this article takes up in arguing for a re-insertion of philosophical pragmatism into our work.

(As an biographical note, I add that this critique regarding the imposition of discourses and a re-orientation around philosophical pragmatism emerges from a deep involvement as teacher and curriculum coordinator in schools serving poor children of color. Although I admire and received training in cultural studies literatures, as a practitioner I argue for a commitment to communities, schools, teachers, and students. As a moral position, I wish to direct reconceptualist ideas into programs, curricula, teachers' practices, and students' consciousnesses. This moral position strives to make reconceptualist work relevant to school work. Later in this article, I will take up Cary's (2003; 2006) and Slattery's (1995; 1999a; 1999b) work in hastening reconceptualists' second wave, but first, I wish to re-orient reconceptualist work through describing the bounds of a practitioner-oriented conversation, because—as Goodson (1990) reminds us—curriculum work does not take place under conditions of one's choosing. Rather, when we engage in curriculum work in schools, we enter contested cultural and historical spaces (Cary, 2003; Cary, 2006).

Physiognomy of Historical Discourse

The physiognomy of historical discourse refers to the thought contours of nationhood as they emerge from the Independence period that are manifest in concrete surroundings. Physiognomy emphasizes the movements of action, thinking, experience, and reflection as they relate to concrete institutions in a continuing an open-ended historical conversation. In order to approach this physiognomy it requires looking not only at dominant but also at particular historical interpretations along with artistic, literary, and political expressions. This section, which seeks to develop the notion of physiognomy as starting point for political action, does so—*not* with conservative intentions of reclaiming foundational and canonized understandings (Bloom, 1987), establishing a cultural knowledge framework that every citizen should know (Hirsch, 1988), nor providing an assumed universal aesthetics (Bloom, 1994). Rather, the notion of physiognomy starts with the pragmatic intention of providing historical dimensions from which curriculum work emerges. The purpose of this physiognomy serves to re-center reconceptualist work toward viable projects. Before providing a physiognomy of US history, this critical reflection distances the notion of physiognomy by drawing on Mexican history, and in so distancing the notion, clarifies it in a way understandable to the reader. After distancing the notion using Mexican history, this critical reflection articulates, more sharply because of the first example, the notion of physiognomy in relation to US history.

History as Mestizaje

The physiognomy of Mexican history takes shape along the contours of the long and conflicted conversation regarding history as mestizaje (articulated and/or discussed in De Benevente, 1994 [1536]; Cervantes de Salazar, 1993 [1554]; De La Vega, 1967 [1609]; Reyes, 1983a [1956]; Reyes, 1983b [1916]; Reyes, 1956; Paz, 1987 [1950]; Paz, 1988 [1979]; Fuentes, 1992 [1962]; Fuentes, 2000 [1981]; Picón Salas, 1994 [1944]; Uslar Pietri, 1974; Uslar Pietri,

1986). In relation to history, *mestizaje* refers, generally in Latin American and more particularly in Mexican letters, to a syncretic historical blending of the indigenous and European whose “true importance and creativity resides in the encounter between and the mixing of distinct cultures” (Uslar Pietri, 1974, p. 24) .

History as *mestizaje* emerges from exchanges, relations, interactions, conversations, and —most importantly— an attitude of “living with” among indigenous peoples and Europeans. While repudiating the massacres committed at the time of the Spanish Military Conquest (Las Casas, 1957 [1559]), history as *mestizaje* argues that the historical present in Mexico emerges from the social experiments of Bartolomé de Las Casas, Pedro de Gante, Vasco de Quiroga, Toribio de Benevente, and many other Dominican and Franciscan monks. These monks, in evangelizing the indigenous tribes, develop a pedagogy that “make themselves like Indian children” (Picón Salas, 1944, p. 86) and promise “[the indigenous] the same heaven that they themselves had been promised” (Reyes, 1956, p. 84). These monks, who never question the Renaissance prejudice that insists on Catholic worldview (not unlike the present insistence on a social/liberal and democratic worldview), argue that the indigenous “had use of reason, judgment, and prudence” (De Las Casas, 1993, p. 20) in the face of Spanish *encomendero* system eager to dismiss them as savages fit only for slavery or murder. In short, in living, working, forming families, and developing projects, the Europeans and indigenous people developed more than a mere curiosity for one another but rather a true moral sympathy (Reyes, 1956).

History as *mestizaje* —it follows— emerges not as a series of dates, battles, and time periods but rather follows a cultural path that culminates in the cultural expression following the Mexican Revolution of 1910. In continuing the notion of history as *mestizaje*, here is an outline that provides several important stopping points. The Baroque period, which in Latin America and Mexico goes beyond that of artistic expression and is used to define the epoch of Spanish decadence in the New World, generates a number of important cultural expressions of a mestizo character including festivals, theatre, art, and architecture (Picón Salas, 1994 [1944]). Of central importance in Baroque expression were “ornamental, intricate, exasperatingly decorative and labyrinthic tendencies...” (Uslar Pietri, 1974, p. 25) visible in colonial cathedrals that combined Spanish architectural designs with “an indigenous hand” (Picón Salas, 1994 [1944], p.109) used in the construction. The cathedrals, in which both indigenous and Spanish influences are present, represent a nascent version of modern Mexican culture.

In 1795 in Monterrey, Friar Servando Teresa de Mier, who makes “an audacious sermon, a theological disparate, behind which emerges the intention of Independence” (Reyes, 1983b [1956], p. 31), represents another important stopping point in Mexican history. Teresa de Mier’s sermon, which holds that the Virgin of Tonantzintla is the Virgin Maria and Queztalcoatl is Saint Thomas, argues that Christianity precedes Spanish colonization thus separating oppressive Spanish rule from a higher religious morality. This separation provides the Mexican War of Independence with a

bid for legitimacy in the face of an historical “feeling of orphanhood” (Paz, 1988 [1979], p.52). Using a syncretic combination of European and indigenous symbols, Father Miguel Hidalgo marches behind the a flag of the Virgin of Guadalupe (Tonantzintla) and initiates the War of Independence which results in a tumultuous and anarchic 19th century stabilized only by Benito Juarez’s “Plan de Ayutla” at mid-century and the violent and progressive dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz at the end of the century. Yet both the Juarez and Diaz administrations exemplify “the image of the ‘Hispano-American dictator’ as having existed in embryonic form in ‘the liberator’” (Paz, 1987 [1950], p. 110). The imposition of liberal democracy by 19th century liberators-dictators represented “a political lie” (Paz, 1987 [1950], p. 111) that failed to address “the concrete historical situation” (Paz, 1987 [1950], p. 110-111) of the indigenous and mestizo masses that remained outside of the promise of justice, equality, and fraternity (Paz, 1987 [1950]).

It is the Mexican Revolution, which represents the re-encounter of the indigenous past in the historical present as a form of Mexican intelligence (Paz, 1987 [1950]), that places the mestizo as historical protagonist (in Fuentes, 1992 [1962]; Fuentes, 1981). The Mexican Revolution, whose ostensible historic symbols —Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata— were mestizos and campesinos, articulates an order later institutionalized by the Partido Revolucionario Institucionalizado (PRI) that adopts mestizaje as a key ideological piece representing the new “dominant culture” that now appears in political stump speeches, textbooks, and news programs. Protest language challenging history as mestizaje, which increasingly revisits LasCasian historical testimonial literatures (see Poniatowska, 1980; Subcomandante Marcos, 2001), represents a return to the 15th and 16th centuries in its insistence on human rights for the marginalized.

Engagement and critique of this physiognomy of historical discourse —history as mestizaje— provides a *starting place for political action in Mexico, a starting point in the public conversation for political projects emerging from Mexican culture.*

Jeffersonian Counter-narrative

In the same way that “history as mestizaje” functions to provide a physiognomy of historical discourse in Mexico, the Jeffersonian counter-narrative provides a similar physiognomy regarding US historical discourse.

The Jeffersonian counter-narrative emerges from Enlightenment thinking which contains as its basis 1) the Whig understanding of history, 2) the English common law tradition, and 3) the individualism of the Scottish Enlightenment (Mayer, 1995). First, the Whig understanding of history focuses on a rejection of the Norman feudalism brought to England by William the Conqueror in 1066. Making a Romantic leap to the Medieval tribal models of government, the Whig understanding of history, which informs “Jefferson’s historical vision” (Mayer, 1995, p. 12), argues that an aristocratic system of government in England represented an oppressive feudal imposition from without. In contrast to this

feudal imposition, the Whig interpretation of history argues for a return to a Saxon tribal democracy articulated in “general assemblies where all important matters were decided” (Mayer, 1995, p. 13). Second, the English common law tradition, which articulated the key tendency in English law was limiting the powers of feudal monarchy, represents common legal training during the Colonial Era and another important piece of the Jeffersonian counter-narrative. This English common law tradition culminates in the Magna Carta’s declaration that “No free man shall be taken or imprisoned, or disseised [sic] or outlawed or exiled or in any way ruined...” (in Mayer, 1995, p. 9). Third, the individualism of the Scottish Enlightenment, which becomes manifest in *The Declaration of Independence* as “We hold these truths to be self-evidence: all men are created equal” (Jefferson, 1998 [1776], p. 715), emerges from the individualism of John Locke, Adam Smith and many others of that time period (Mayer, 1995) that “man is born with inalienable rights; that government, deriving its just power from the consent of the governed, existed to protect those rights; and that all men equally possessed the same rights and merited similar protections” (Mayer, 1995, p. 85). This grouping of democratic assembly, individual protections against government abuse of power, and the belief in equality of citizens—all of which, it must be recalled, respond to the conditions of living under an oppressive monarchy—represent the first Jeffersonian counter-narrative. The first counter-narrative served in its particular historical moment as a means of liberating a white male patrician elite from unjust aristocratic oppression (Wood, 1991).

The argument regarding history as Jeffersonian counter-narrative is not that a just Republic emerged as a result of the American Revolution. In fact, a present viewing of US society shows “one percent of the nation...owns 40% of its wealth” (Zinn, 2003 [1980], p. 684). In engaging the American Revolution and Founding Fathers from the viewpoint of the present, it is wise to recall that—Around 1776, certain important people in the English Colonies made a discovery that would prove enormously useful for the next two hundred years. They found that by creating a nation, a symbol, a legal entity called the United States, they could take over land, profits, and political power from favorites of the British Empire. (Zinn, 2003 [1980], p. 59)

The importance of history as Jeffersonian counter-narrative, rather than providing a final stopping place or a unitary monolith for thinking and acting politically, resides in its generative power in relation to successive politically and historically located projects. Also important in considering history as Jeffersonian counter-narrative is that it operates—and continues to do so tacitly—along an historical *disjunction* of civilization/ barbarism which reflects, at its center, a secularization of the Medieval categories of Christian/pagan (Jennings, 1976).

By keeping both history as Jeffersonian counter-narrative and its historical disjunction in mind, it becomes possible to work along the contradictions of US historical discourse. Critical literatures on US history articulate difference as disjunction concerning race, class, gender, sexuality, and other differences (for overview see Zinn, 2003 [1980]). Through the lens of disjunction, it becomes

possible to understand the radicalism of the American Revolution that emphasizes the transfer of power from an elite white group of male patricians to white middle-class and artisan males with a democratic orientation (Wood, 1991; Schlesinger, 1945). The disjunction emerges in the US government's policy of Indian removal that culminates in the Trail of Tears massacre and the extinction of many Indian tribes (Remini, 1997). It becomes possible to understand a Civil War that was ostensibly fought over divisions regarding the emancipation of African slaves. The disjunction emerges in segregation, poll taxes, literacy tests, disenfranchisement, and Jim Crow in the postbellum South. It becomes possible to understand the gains of the Seneca Falls feminists whose understandings of gender equality reach through successive generations in the form of suffragettes, flappers, and working women. The disjunction emerges in white feminists' frequent omission or exclusion of women of color. It becomes possible to understand the contributions of Progressive Era activists, authors, and politicians who revealed the plight of those de-humanized by the Industrial Revolution. The disjunction emerges in that many progressives saw the poor immigrants with whom they worked through a white upper- and middle-class lens that interpreted difference as deficiency. It becomes possible to understand the rhetoric of the World Wars that "saved" the world from German domination and fascism. The disjunction emerges in a blindness to US racism and the development of a quasi-totalitarian technocratic power elite (Mills, 2000 [1956]). It becomes possible to understand the partial successes of 50s, 60s, and 70s civil rights leaders who help forge a middle class of minorities and working women. The disjunction emerges in that many minorities and women are left stranded outside such benefits as if no movements had ever occurred. It becomes possible to understand the present fight for gay rights that, after gaining presence as part of the "sexual revolution" of the 70s, currently focuses on making in-roads into conservative institutions like marriage and parenting issues as a form of political praxis.

The key questions regarding the expansion of the Jeffersonian counter-narrative as it relates to political practices in education remains: Who gets to be considered as "civilized"? Who remains at the margins of the benefits of this "civilization"? How can we provide curricula that develop constituencies among the marginalized? How can schools develop programs that work effectively with historically dispossessed constituencies? These four questions are particularly important in developing a political practice that has traction in larger policy circles, and although No Child Left Behind (NCLB) represents a bid for power applying Jeffersonian discourse of equality and individual achievement, for those of us working in schools it represents an authoritarian lie from without that fails to consider democracy as part of day-to-day life (Davis, 2003).

Nonetheless, engagement and critique of this physiognomy of historical discourse —history as Jeffersonian counter-narrative— provides a *starting place for political action in the US, a starting point in public conversations emerging in US culture.*

A New Synthesis: Philosophical Pragmatism and

Reconceptualist Work

Inherent in the physiognomy of US historical discourse is the notion of philosophical pragmatism. Also emerging from Continental discourses of the Enlightenment and Romantic traditions represented by the thinking of John Stuart Mill, philosophical pragmatism undergoes an “indigenization” understood as disjunction and counter-narrative above. Philosophical pragmatism, whose beginnings are apparent in Emerson’s insistence on experience, Thoreau’s researches in the woods, Whitman’s songs of democracy, and Pierce’s Christian community and common intelligence, focus on immediate social and political engagement. William James formalizes pragmatism; John Dewey brings it to maturity; and, others —such as Martin Luther King, Cesar Chavez, and Betty Friedan— use it as a source of cultural criticism and political engagement. WEB DuBois, C. Wright Mills, Sidney Hook, Lionel Trilling, and Richard Rorty along with educators like George Counts, Hollis Caswell, Jesse Newlon, and Hilda Taba make critical and progressive uses of philosophical pragmatism in professional areas as diverse as journalism, sociology, literary criticism, administration, and curriculum.

Philosophical pragmatism focuses on socially-mediated conversations regarding structures of knowledge, institutions, and cultural practices (West, 1989; West, 1992; West, 1993). Philosophical pragmatism assumes that knowledge, institutions, and cultural practices require continued ameliorative remediation through uses of critical intelligence. Critical intelligence, exercised as local and contingent, drives this continued ameliorative remediation through processes of material experimentation, reflection, and on-going critical revision. Critical intelligence, working within and against structures of knowledge, institutions, and cultural practices, provides for plastic, pluralistic, generative, and open-ended understanding of lives within structures. This understanding of lives within structures necessarily focuses on lived experiences through historical and social structures of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other difference markers that limit individuals’ lives and lessen their agency. As moral aim, philosophical pragmatism strives to enable lives within these limiting structures. The best of philosophical pragmatism represents...a diverse heterogeneous tradition. But its common denominator consists of a future-oriented instrumentalism that tries to deploy thought as a weapon to enable more effective action. Its basic impulse is a plebian radicalism that fuels antipatrican rebelliousness for the moral aim of enriching individuals and expanding democracy. (West, 1989, p. 6)

Although historically ethnocentric and cognizant of Anglo-American exclusionism regarding people of color (West, 1989), philosophical pragmatism’s on-going contribution is that it urges individuals toward political engagement in historical and social conversation as well as contingent and local material experiments (West, 1989; West, 1992; West, 1993). Because philosophical pragmatism discourages academic scholasticism, requires engagement in socially mediated conversations and institutions, focuses on critical intelligence in local and pluralistic circumstances, provides material experiments in institutional

practices, and emphasizes enabling human agency, it remains the cornerstone of potential curriculum development projects in schools, especially in the face of post 9/11 technocratic hegemony that systematically reduces spaces for such conversations (Cary, 2003; Cary, 2006).

As a practitioner working in schools, questions regarding the reconceptualists' "second wave" become: What does reconceptualized administration look like? What might a program that engages K-12 students in "*currere*" (Pinar, 1975; Pinar, 2002; Pinar, 2004) look like? What might a program focusing on critical inquiry look like? What might a program focusing on gender studies be? What might a program focusing on multicultural studies and critical race theory look like? These types of questions should be the ones that students of the reconceptualists should be taking up rather than postponing (again, passing the difficult work to others!) the entry of reconceptualist thinking into K-12. Answering even one of these questions, when engaging in socially mediated conversations with others, could take up the space of one's career. Unfortunately, reconceptualists generally leave these questions for others, and therefore, lessen their credibility and political capital with practitioners. Nonetheless, an undercurrent within reconceptualist work begins to take up issues relevant to practitioners (Cary, 2003, Cary, 2006; Vasquez, 2006; Slattery, 1995; Slattery, 1999a; Slattery, 1999b).

Cary's work on curriculum spaces (2003; 2006), when read administratively, provides a starting point in the synthesis of reconceptualist work and philosophical pragmatism. Cary (2003; 2006) articulates how philosophical assumptions create exclusions-inclusions in educational practices. Important in this argument is Cary's (2003; 2006) notion of creating, preserving, and enacting curriculum spaces which enable conversations, voices, and agency (Cary, 2003). Pragmatically speaking, this notion of curriculum spaces allows for privileged practitioners to reflexively create inclusions —always, of course, within constraints— as they work on developmental curriculum projects and instructional strategies. Creating inclusion, through the lens of curriculum spaces (Cary, 2003; Cary, 2006; Vasquez, 2006), represents a process of painstaking cultural negotiation (Vasquez, 2006). Creating inclusion, especially under conditions of sufficient academic rigor to count as "success" (Vasquez, 2006), is never a zero-sum game, but rather, it represents a process in which cultural identities resist and cede to exigencies of historical and social structures (Vasquez, 2006). This work on creating curriculum spaces (Cary, 2003; Cary, 2006; Vasquez, 2006) provides a starting point in conversations on material curriculum experiments.

Additionally, Slattery's work (1995; 1999a; 1999b) provides direction in this synthesis. Slattery's work (1995; 1999a; 1999b), which draws on postmodern ontological assumptions, articulates pragmatic concerns in discussions of reconceptualized leadership (1999a) and curriculum development (1995; 1999b). Slattery (1995; 1999a; 1999b) insists on pressing one important question: Given a postmodern ontology, what should administration and curriculum development look like?

Regarding reconceptualized administration, Slattery and McElfresh Spehler (1999b) argue for discarding a technical rationality that ultimately represses lives within institutions; rather, they posit a postmodern administrative vision that refuses separating aesthetics and ethics. Drawing on visual artists, Slattery and McElfresh Spehler (1999b) reveal a human condition in which human agents are painfully reduced in the hopes of re-animating them with a prophetic voice. This hope of re-animating human subjects provides administrators with ethical-moral direction in the amplification of agency. Important in Slattery and McElfresh Spehler's work is that they take up administration as cultural creation rather than accepting the prevailing ready-made technical rationales prevalent in schools.

Regarding reconceptualized curriculum development, Slattery (1995) presents possible strands for curriculum development: theological, autobiographical, multicultural, ecological, and democratic. In his synoptic text of reconceptualist work, Slattery (1995) takes up spirituality in arguing that theological curricula focusing on active and on-going spiritual relation rather than of studies of fixed dogma. Additionally, Slattery argues for autobiographical curricula that focuses on human understanding as hermeneutic study in further developing Pinar's *currere* (1975; 2002; 2004). Slattery's reading of *currere* insists on creative and generative understanding within communities. In continuation, Slattery argues for curriculum development that embraces a multicultural milieu not as add-on or celebration but as allowing for and exploring divergent identities in classrooms. Pentultimately, Slattery presents and argues for an ecological curriculum that focuses on green understandings and worldviews that transcend national boundaries and focus on global communities. Finally, Slattery presents and argues for critical curriculum development self-conscious of ideological manifestations in our lives as well as in schooling texts. Constructivist and utopian in his orientations, Slattery (1995) addresses practitioners in arguing:

Reflecting on the prevailing [postmodern] social trends, educators appear to be blinded to the epochal nature of global transformations as they employ modern strategies to alleviate the pain of by-products of social upheaval. ...The spiritual, aesthetic, historical, sociopolitical, ethical, racial, gendered, and cultural dimensions of the human community, as we discussed throughout part two of this book, must be incorporated into our understanding of curriculum development. (p. 248-249)

Urging practitioners toward this utopian project, Slattery's (1999a; 1999b; 1995) contribution is that of making explicit a reconceptualized administrative and curricular vision.

From Pinar to Pinar/A Past-Future Recounted-Foretold

In closing this essay that aspires to re-invigorate reconceptualist work with a pragmatic vision, I emphasize that the physiognomy of

US historical discourse *not* as a correct version of history but as space for engagement and critique in order to develop critical curriculum projects for students still left outside of the Jeffersonian counter-narrative. Critical curriculum projects worthy of attention, from my point of view as curriculum worker in a public school serving poor, minority, and immigrant students, must work to synthesize reconceptualist work and philosophical pragmatism in order to develop curriculum spaces that make for community among researchers and practitioners. Too long over the last thirty years reconceptualists stayed within the confines of the university and critiqued an imagined curriculum. In doing so, reconceptualists discounted what they might learn by working pragmatically with administrators, teachers, parents, and students on curriculum development projects and programs. As an important direction, I suggest not the conservative dismissal of reconceptualist work prevalent in present circumstances but rather the *synthesis* of reconceptualist work and philosophical pragmatism, *synthesis* of critical intelligence regarding social issues with a belief that work in public schools is worthy of our time, *synthesis* of critical theoretic orientations with curriculum development projects in schools.

This synthesis breaks the bounds of linear time and places us in a past-future not far from Pinar's (1978) intentions for reconceptualized work almost thirty years ago. In discussing conflicts between empiricists, pragmatists, and reconceptualists, Pinar (1978) urges-urges-will urge us toward a new synthesis:

Becoming open to another genre of work does not mean loss of one's capacity for critical reflection. Nor does it mean, necessarily, loss of intellectual identity. One may remain traditionalist while sympathetically studying the work of a reconceptualist. One's own point of view may well be enriched. Further, an intellectual climate may become established in which we could develop *syntheses* of current perspectives, regenerating the field, and making more likely that its contribution to American education be an important one. [my italics] (p. 213)

As reconceptualists, we must take on administrative and developmental visions in our work and sink in the time and commitment to realize these visions.

These syntheses outlined above put us on tension-filled territory of privileged administrator/reconceptualist cultural critic. Adorno (2001[1922]) imagined-imagines-will imagine this tension-filled territory as possible modality within a technocratic administrative rationality, the administration of cultural spaces against the same administrative rationality:

If the administrated world is to be understood as one from which all hiding places are fast disappearing, it should still be possible for this world to compensate for this and, by virtue of the powers of men [sic] of insight, to create centres of freedom as they are eradicated by the blind and unconscious process of

mere social selection. (p. 130)

Adorno (2001 [1922]) sees culture and administration, not as reified and static opposites, but rather as fluid and interacting, yet radically constrained, aesthetic possibilities:

No matter how reified both categories [administration and culture] are in reality, neither is totally reified; both refer back to living subjects – just as does the most adventurous cybernetic machine. ...Whoever makes critically and unflinchingly conscious use of the means of administration and its institutions is still in a position to realize something which would be different from the predominant administrated culture. The minimal differences from the ever constant which are open to him [sic] define for him [sic] – no matter how hopelessly – the difference concerning the totality; it is in the difference itself – divergence – that hope is concentrated. (p. 131)

Hope, for Adorno (2001 [1922]), emerged-emerges-will emerge in the material and administrated concrete experimenting with reified but not completely closed off spaces. Rather than fixed (fetishized?) ideological polemic, the syntheses suggested here offer a different form of radicalism: administrator as cultural critic, program administration as cultural criticism. This radicalism –the one of material experimentation through administration– is the one that the synthesis of reconceptualist work and philosophical pragmatism presents us.

This critical reflection, a reflection that seeks a synthesis of reconceptualist work and pragmatic concerns of administration and program development, strives to reconstitute a progressive vision. As Freire (1992) writes, this progressive vision must focus on engagement in the material present:

Once more, then, it becomes incumbent upon them [leaders, administrators] to maintain a serious, rigorous relationship between tactics and strategy.... In the last analysis, the problem facing the leaders is: they must learn through the critical reading of reality that must always be made, what actions can be tactically implemented, and on what levels they can be so implemented. In other words, what can we do now in order to be able to do tomorrow what we are unable to do today (p. 125).

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Footnotes

1. Of course, not all reconceptualist curriculum work will fit in this characterization of the reconceptualized field. Nonetheless, the great majority of work emerging from a

frame of cultural criticism lies within this characterization.
For a definition of the term reconceptualist see Pinar 1975;
1978; 2002.

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